

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 NEA-06 ISO-00 EURE-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00

INRE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-05 L-02

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 IO-10

AF-04 SSC-01 CPR-01 /071 W

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O P 131534Z DEC 74

FM AMEMBASSY VALLETTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5912

INFO RUDTC AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 2149

AMEMBASSY ROME PRIORITY

USEC BRUSSELS PRIORITY 234

AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI PRIORITY

USMISSION USUN PRIORITY

USMISSION NATO PRIORITY

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, PFOR, MT, UK, VT

SUBJ: CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES APPROVED: MALTA A REPUBLIC

REF: VALLETTA 1812, 1795, 1784, 1756, 1751 (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY: MALTESE PARLIAMENT APPROVED PRIME MINISTER MINTOFF'S PROPOSED CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES ON DECEMBER 12, WITH KEY VOTE OF 49 IN FAVOR AND ONLY 6 AGAINST, WELL IN EXCESS OF REQUIRED TWO-THIRDS MAJORITY. GOVERNOR GENERAL SIRY ANTHONY MAMO WILL BE INSTALLED AS PRESIDENT ON EVENING OF DECEMBER 13.

2. IN AN EVENING SESSION ON DECEMBER 12, PARLIAMENT COMPLETED APPROVAL OF ALL ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF PRIME MINISTER MINTOFF'S PACKAGE OF THREE BILLS AMENDING MALTA'S CONSTITUTION AND ELCTORAL LAWS. A FEW AMENDMENTS WERE ACCEPTED BY MINTOFF
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TO PLACATE OPPOSITION (NATIONALIST) CONCERN OVER CERTAIN

ASPECTS OF THE BILLS, BUT IN ESSENCE MINTOFF WON A CLEAR, DECISIVE PARLIAMENTARY VICTORY ON THE CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUE WITHOUT CHANGING ANY OF HIS DEEP-SEATED AND OFTEN-EXPRESSED VIEWS.

3. DURING THE COMPLICATED MANEUVERING BOTH ON AND OFF THE PARLIAMENTARY STAGE WHICH LED TO THIS RESULT, MINTOFF SKILLFULLY "BOXED" THE NATIONALIST PARTY INTO A CORNER FROM WHICH THERE WAS NO RETREAT. (COMMENT: CARTOON IN MALTA PRESS LAST WEEK DEPICTED MINTOFF "FLOATING LIKE A BUTTERFLY AND STINGING LIKE A BEE" OVER A HELPLESS GEORGE BOR OLIVIER, LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION. END COMMENT)

4. THERE ACTUALLY WERE ONLY TWO DIVISIONS OF THE HOUSE DURING THE CONSTITUTIONAL DEBATE, WITH MANY OF THE CHANGES BEING APPROVED WITHOUT A VOTE TABULATION. IN ONE EARLY TEST CASE, BORG OLIVIER KEPT ON THE NATIONALIST WHIP, AND THE RESULT WAS A PREDICTABLE 29 TO 26 STRAIGHT PARTY VOTE IN FAVOR OF MINTOFF.

5. APPARENTLY REALIZING THE INEVITABLE, BORG OLIVER ANNOUNCED IN PARLIAMENT ON DECEMBER 10 THAT THE FINAL VOTE WOULD BE A "FEE" ONE, WITH EACH NATIONALIST MP BEING ALLOWED TO VOTE HIS CONSCIENCE. IN THE SHOWDOWN LAST NIGHT, THE FINAL VOTE WAS 49 IN FAVOR OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS AND ONLY 6 AGAINST, WELL IN EXCESS OF THE TWO-THIRDS MAJORITY REQUIRED TO AMEND THE CONSTITUTION. ONLY DR. GEORGE BORG OLIVIER, HIS BROTHER, PAUL BORG OLIVIER, HIS NEPHEW, ALBERT BORG OLIVIER DE PUGET, AND THREE OTHER NATIONALIST MPS VOTED AGAINST MINTOFF.

6. OFFICIAL PREPARATIONS FOR PROCLAIMING MALTA A REPUBLIC AND INSTALLING GOVERNOR GENERAL SIR ANTHONY MAMO AS THE FIRST PRESIDENT WERE WELL UNDER WAY EARLY THIS WEEK, EVEN BEFORE THE KEY VOTES HAD BEEN TAKEN IN PARLIAMENT, REFLECTING MINTOFF'S EXTREME SELF-CONFIDENCE. GOM DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION ISSUED OFFICIAL PRESS RELEASE LAST ON DECEMBER 12 STATING THAT SWEARING-IN CEREMONY FOR SIR ANTHONY, MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT, MINISTERS AND JUDGES WOULD TAKE PLACE DECEMBER 13 AT 7:30 P.M. MALTA TIME. DIPLOMATIC CORPS WILL ATTEND. MAMO WILL ADDRESS THE PEOPLE IMMEDIATELY THEREAFTER.

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7. COMMENT: THERE IS A CERTAIN DEGREE OF BEMUSED BEWILDERMENT AMONG THE MALTESE PUBLIC ABOUT THE QUIET END TO WHAT HAD BEEN FORECAST AS A GREAT CONSTITUTIONAL AND PARLIAMENTARY CRISIS FOR MALTA. MINTOFF'S DETERMINATION, SKILLFUL MANIPULATION, AND QUICK SUCCESS HAVE LEFT MANY WONDERING WHAT THE FUSS WAS ALL ABOUT, AND MORE IMPORTANTLY, WHAT DIFFERENCE IT WILL MAKE IN THEIR LIVES. IN ANY EVENT, PRO-GOVERNMENT MALTA NEWS SUMMED IT UP TODAY BY STATING "WELCOME, MR. PRESIDENT*", "HISTORIC

DAY FOR MALTA, SIR ANTHONY MAMO". MAMO IS A POPULAR, INDEPENDENT-MINDED AND WELL-RESPECTED FORMER CHIEF JUSTICE. HIS SELECTION BY MINTOFF AS FIRST PRESIDENT WAS SHREWD POLITICAL MOVE WHICH WILL BE WELCOMED BY POLITICIANS ON BOTH SIDES OF THE AISLE AND THE PUBLIC AT LARGE. IT ALSO AVOIDS WHAT OTHERWISE COULD HAVE BEEN A BRUISING POLITICAL BATTLE OVER THE SELECTION OF THE FIRST PRESIDENT. END COMMENT.

8. ACTION REQUESTED: EMBASSY RECOMMENDS THAT CONGRATULATORY MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT FORD BY CONVEYED TO SIR ANTHONY MAMO. IT WOULD BE APPRECIATED IF DEPARTMENT WOULD TRANSMIT TEXT OF PRESIDENTIAL MESSAGE TO EMBASSY FOR DELIVERY BY AMBASSADOR TO MAMO. SMITH

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: DEMOCRACY, CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 13 DEC 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: CunninFX
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974VALLET01883
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D740362-0935
From: VALLETTA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19741234/aaaabdie.tel
Line Count: 128
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 74 VALLETTA 1812, 74 1795, 74 1784, 74 1756, 74 1751
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: CunninFX
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 08 APR 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <08 APR 2002 by boyleja>; APPROVED <28 MAR 2003 by CunninFX>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES APPROVED: MALTA A REPUBLIC
TAGS: PINT, PFOR, PGOV, MT, UK, VT
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005